

**Washington, DC-** This week House Veteran's Affairs Committee member Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) held a telephone townhall meeting with US. Veterans Administration (VA) Secretary Dr. James Peake and Congressman John Salazar (CO-3). During the call the three addressed a number of veterans issues and took questions from constituents throughout Rodriguez's district from San Antonio, Del Rio, Alpine, among other communities. Over 4,300 people were able to participate.

Some of the topics discussed included a bill that Congressmen Rodriguez and Salazar recently co-sponsored, the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act (HR 1527), which would provide increased access to civilian providers for veterans residing far way from VA health centers if it were to become law. The Veterans' Integrated Service Network (VISN) that covers Rodriguez's district west of Del Rio and portions of Congressman Salazar's district in Colorado would be one of the pilot VISNs under this bill.

Also discussed was the VA's recently announced new outreach center in Bexar County, and an additional Community Based Outreach Center in El Paso County, the VA's simplified application process for veterans' benefits on its website and the VA's effectiveness of its suicide prevention hotline, in addition to several other questions from constituents.

"We make a promise to our service members that when they become veterans we will take care of them," said Rodriguez. "Secretary Peake served our country in war, and also as a military physician in Texas. In his short tenure Dr. Peake has done his best to cut through the red tape and help our Texas veterans. I look forward to our continued work together through my service on the VA Committee so that we may give the best opportunities to those who have protected our country."

In the coming months Rodriguez will take a trip to the Middle East with the VA Health Subcommittee.